



Commander of the International Security Assistance Force (ISAF), Gen. John Campbell, right, and ISAF Gen. Hans-Lothar Domrose attend a ceremony at the ISAF headquarters in Kabul, Afghanistan, Sunday, Dec. 28, 2014.

Associated Press
Page 3

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U.S., NATO mark end of 13-year war in Afghanistan

LYNNE O'DONNELL

Associated Press

KABUL, Afghanistan (AP)

— The war in Afghanistan, fought for 13 bloody years and still raging, came to a formal end Sunday with a quiet flag-lowering ceremony in Kabul that marked the transition of the fighting from U.S.-led combat troops to the country's own security forces.

In front of a small, hand-picked audience at the headquarters of the NATO mission, the green-and-white flag of the International Security Assistance Force was ceremonially rolled up and sheathed, and the flag of the new international mission called Resolute Support was hoisted.

U.S. Gen. John Campbell, commander of ISAF, commemorated the 3,500 international soldiers killed on Afghan battlefields and praised the country's army for giving him confidence that they are able to take on the fight alone.

"Resolute Support will serve as the bedrock of an enduring partnership" between NATO and Afghanistan, Campbell told an audience of Afghan and international military officers and officials, as well as diplomats and journalists.

"The road before us remains challenging, but we will triumph," he added. Beginning Jan. 1, the new mission will provide training and support for Afghanistan's military, with the U.S. accounting for almost 11,000 of the 13,500 members of the residual force.

"Thanks to the extraordinary sacrifices of our men and women in uniform, our combat mission in Afghanistan is ending, and the longest war in American history is coming to a re-

sponsible conclusion," U.S. President Barack Obama said in a statement issued in Hawaii, where he is on vacation with his family.

Afghan President Ashraf Ghani, who took office in September, signed bilateral security agreements with Washington and NATO allowing the ongoing military presence. The move has led to a spike in violence, with the Taliban claiming it as an excuse to step up operations aimed at destabilizing his government.

ISAF was set up after the U.S.-led invasion as an umbrella for the coalition of around 50 nations that provided troops and took responsibility for security across the country. It ends with 2,224 American soldiers killed, according to an Associated Press tally.

The mission, which was initially aimed at toppling the Taliban and rooting out al-Qaida following the Sept. 11, 2001 attacks, peaked at 140,000 troops in 2010. Obama ordered a surge to drive the insurgents out of strategically important regions, notably in the southern provinces of Helmand and Kandahar, where the Taliban had its capital from 1996 to 2001.

Taliban spokesman Zabihullah Mujahid called Sunday's event a "defeat ceremony" and said the insurgents' fight would continue.

"Since the invasion in 2001 until now, these events have been aimed at changing public opinion, but we will fight until there is not one foreign soldier on Afghan soil and we have established an Islamic state," he said.

Obama recently expanded the role of U.S. forces

remaining in the country, allowing them to extend their counter-terrorism operations to the Taliban, as well as al-Qaida, and to provide ground and air support for Afghan forces when necessary for at least the next two years.

In a tacit recognition that international military support is still essential for Afghan forces. □



Commander of the International Security Assistance Force (ISAF), Gen. John Campbell, left, and Command Sgt. Maj. Delbert Byers open the "Resolute Support" flag during a ceremony at the ISAF headquarters in Kabul, Afghanistan, Sunday, Dec. 28, 2014.

Associated Press

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Ebola chief says CDC lab incident poses no risk to public

ATLANTA (AP) — The U.S. Ebola response coordinator is calling the mishandling of materials that led to a lab technician's possible exposure to the virus "unacceptable." Ebola Response Coordinator Ron Klain told CBS television's "Face the Nation" on Sunday that the incident at a Centers for Disease Control and Prevention lab carried no risk to the public because of protocols and procedures in

place. Klain says the CDC technician, who may have come into contact with a small amount of live virus during an experiment, is being monitored daily and shows no signs of infection. Klain also said the Food and Drug Administration has approved widespread testing to begin in three or four weeks in West Africa of a vaccine to prevent Ebola. He says tens of thousands of people will get the vaccine. □



In this Monday, Oct. 6, 2014, file photo, licensed clinician Hala Fawal practices drawing blood from a patient using a dummy in Anniston, Ala. Associated Press

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5 dead in apartment building fire near San Antonio

CASTLE HILLS, Texas (AP) — Five people died Sunday after a fire broke out at a senior-living apartment building in the San Antonio suburb of Castle Hills, authorities said. Eleven other residents of the Wedgwood Apartments were hospitalized, and at least one is in critical condition, according to

Bexar County Fire Marshall spokeswoman Laura Jesse. About 150 additional residents of the 11-story high-rise were taken by city buses to a local high school, and about 100 people remained there Sunday afternoon. A total of 150 firefighters from San Antonio and six other fire departments responded to the blaze. □



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Ca. man suspected of vandalizing Islamic center

SCOTT SMITH

Associated Press

FRESNO, California (AP)

— A 28-year-old man has been arrested on suspicion of vandalizing the Islamic Cultural Center of Fresno on Christmas day, causing investigators at first to suspect a hate crime, police said Saturday.

But relatives of the 28-year-old suspect, Asif Mohammad Khan, came public to say that schizophrenia — and not hatred — led to the unfortunate incident. "It is a case of mental illness," said his sister, Samia Khan. "There's no question about that."

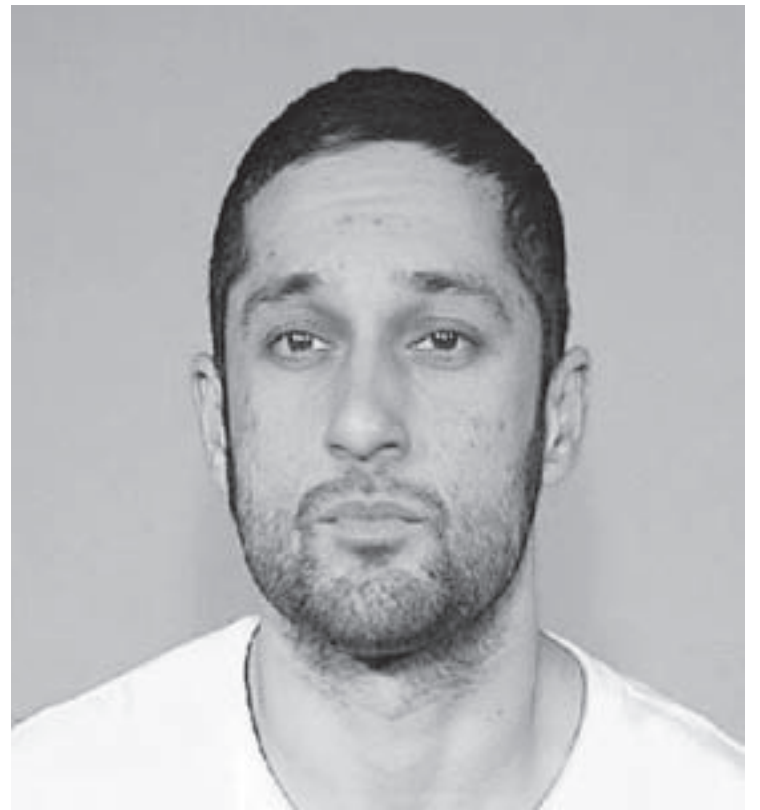
Asif Mohammad Khan has been booked into jail on charges including felony vandalism for more than \$10,000 in damage done Thursday to the Islamic Cultural Center and a nearby medical office.

In the search for a suspect, Fresno Police Chief Jerry Dyer had said that the broken windows and bleach poured on an American flag inside the Islamic center appeared to be a hate crime. On Saturday, Dyer said that investigators interviewed Khan, and their theory has changed. "It was obviously not as we thought," said Dyer, adding

that police will let FBI agents decide whether hate-crime charges are warranted.

Khan confessed, telling officers he was upset with people at the Islamic center for talking down or bullying him, Dyer said.

Samia Khan said doctors in 2009 diagnosed her brother as schizophrenic, and in the days before the incidents he had not taken his medication. Khan said she joined Fresno police at a news conference to explain her brother's illness. She said her family is part of Fresno's close-knit Muslim community and apologized for her brother. □



This photo provided by the Fresno Police Department shows Asif Mohammad Khan. Associated Press

Arizona police officer killed; suspect dead

FLAGSTAFF, Arizona (AP)

— A 24-year-old police officer died after being shot by a domestic violence suspect who then killed himself Saturday afternoon in Arizona.

Officer Tyler J. Stewart, 24, died at Flagstaff Medical Center, police said. Stewart is the second Flagstaff police officer ever to be killed in the line of duty.

Stewart was looking for the man — identified as Robert W. Smith, 28, of Prescott — about 1:30 p.m. when Smith fired several shots at the officer, police said. Smith



This Nov. 27, 2008 photo released by the Flagstaff Police Department, shows police officer Tyler Stewart.


Associated Press

then shot himself and was pronounced dead at the scene, police added.

Investigators do not believe Stewart fired any shots, but they continue to investigate the matter, Sgt. Margaret Bentzen said.

Stewart had worked at the department for less than a year, police said. "It is heartbreaking to lose one of our officers," Mayor Jerry Nabours said. "We collectively mourn for his family and the entire department." A candlelight vigil has been scheduled by


Stewart's family and the Flagstaff Police Department for Sunday evening at the Officer Down Memorial Statue in front of the police department at 911 E. Sawmill. The shooting was the second one of a police officer in northern Arizona in the past three months. In October, a tribal police officer of the Navajo Nation was shot in the face during a shootout with a male suspect in the town of Kaibeto, which is 75 miles (120 kilometers) north of Flagstaff. The officer survived. □



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A bigger tent? Republicans face minority challenge

STEVE PEOPLES

Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — The faces of the Republican Party's most ambitious members are changing. Long criticized as the party of old white men, the Republicans' next class of presidential contenders may include two Hispanic senators, an Indian-American governor, a female business leader and an African-American neurosurgeon. In a group that could exceed a dozen Republican White House prospects, all but a few are in their 40s or 50s, while one of the oldest white men is a fluent Spanish speaker whose wife is a native Mexican.

The diverse group is a point of pride for those Re-



In this Nov. 20, 2014, file photo, former Florida Gov. Jeb Bush, center, recites the Pledge of Allegiance before giving the keynote address at the National Summit on Education Reform in Washington.

Associated Press

publicans who have long pushed for a welcoming "big tent" party able to accommodate more diver-

sity. "This is a diverse nation, and we need to be a diverse party," said Carly

Fiorina, the former Hewlett-Packard chief executive and only Republican woman openly weighing a 2016 bid. "That doesn't mean we sacrifice our principles, but it means we need to look like and understand and empathize with the nation."

Republican strategists hope that a more diverse slate of candidates will help appeal to a growing minority population that has given Democrats a decided advantage in the last two presidential contests.

It's unclear, however, whether changing the faces of the Republicans' messengers will be enough to take back the White House in 2016. As critics point out, Republicans have alienated some minority voters by pushing for voter identification laws that disproportionately affect nonwhites, while resisting comprehensive changes in the immigration and criminal justice systems.

"They're going to have to make a decision about whether they're going to build a meaningful multiracial coalition by respecting and defending the rights of all people in this country," said Benjamin Jealous, a former president of the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People, a leading civil rights group, "or whether they're going to continue to play this dog-whistle politics that have besmirched the Republican Party since the days of Barry Goldwater." The Republican Party has struggled with attracting support from minorities since Democratic President Lyndon B. Johnson signed into law the Civil Rights Act of 1964. Goldwater, the Republican presidential

nominee, opposed it. But Jealous and others suggest there are signs of hope in a crowded and diverse 2016 Republican class.

Florida Sen. Marco Rubio and Texas Sen. Ted Cruz are both Hispanic, while Louisiana Gov. Bobby Jindal is the first Indian-American governor in the U.S.

Former Florida Gov. Jeb Bush recently announced plans to "actively explore" a presidential bid. At 61, he is among the older would-be Republican candidates. Bush speaks fluent Spanish, is married to a native Mexican and lists as one of his signature issues an immigration overhaul that includes a pathway to citizenship for immigrants in the country illegally.

The field of prospective candidates also includes Kentucky Sen. Rand Paul, a libertarian-minded Republican who has already shown an ability to attract younger people and minorities. Paul, who is white, was the only Republican presidential prospect to visit Ferguson, Missouri, as the city was ripped apart by racial tension this fall over a white police officer fatally shooting an unarmed, black teenager. Retired neurosurgeon and conservative firebrand Ben Carson, who grew up in Detroit, can speak to racial issues from a unique perspective as the early field's only African-American.

"Police have to admit that maybe there are some other tactics and things that can be utilized," Carson said in a recent Associated Press interview. "People in neighborhoods have to recognize that people who are thugs are thugs."

Continued on Page 7







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THE VOYAGE 12H BAG – THE REGINAL BOOT

A bigger tent

Continued from Page 6

You can't make them into angels. Unless the two sides can admit those things, meaningful discussions will never be had."

The Republican Party's survival may depend on its ability to expand beyond its white, male base.

That's according to the Republican National Committee,

which commissioned a review of the 2012 presidential election that found its position "precarious" because of the nation's demographic changes.

"America is changing demographically and unless Republicans are able to grow our appeal," the authors wrote,

"the changes tilt the playing field even more in the Democratic direction."

As the 2013 report notes, the American elector-



In this Oct. 16, 2014 file photo, Sen. Rand Paul, R-Ky., is greeted by state GOP Chair Jennifer Horn at the party headquarters in Concord, N.H.

Associated Press

ate was 88 percent white in 1980, according to exit polls. White voters represented just 72 percent of those who cast ballots in the 2012 presidential election.

By 2050, predicts the Pew Hispanic Center, the per-

centage will fall to 47. Still, Republican leaders are more confident about the demographic shifts today than they were immediately after a painful 2012 election season.

Just last month, Republicans claimed control of

millions of dollars to minority engagement efforts that will continue in Hispanic communities across swing states like Colorado, Florida and Virginia.

They also established permanent field offices in urban areas such as Detroit that have long been ignored by Republicans.

The Republicans's success may be misleading, however.

Turnout in the 2014 midterms was among the lowest since World War II, and those casting ballots were older,

whiter and more male than voters in recent presidential years.

Republicans have their work cut out for them in 2016, when many Democrats expect to nominate former Secretary of State Hillary Rodham Clinton. □

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U.S. farmers brace for labor shortage under new policy

SCOTT SMITH

Associated Press

FRESNO, California (AP)

— Farmers already scrambling to find workers in California — the leading U.S. grower of fruits, vegetables and nuts — fear an even greater labor shortage under President Barack Obama's executive action to block some 5 million people from deportation. Thousands of the state's farmworkers, who make up a significant portion of those who will benefit, may choose to leave the uncertainty of their seasonal jobs for steady, year-around work building homes, cooking in restaurants and cleaning hotel rooms.

"This action isn't going to bring new workers to agriculture," said Jason Resnick, vice president and general counsel of the powerful trade association



In this Sept. 24, 2013 file photo taken near Fresno, Calif., farmworkers pick paper trays of dried raisins off the ground and heap them onto a trailer in the final step of raisin harvest.

Associated Press

Western Growers. "It's possible that because of this action, agriculture will lose

workers without any mechanism to bring in new workers."

Although details of the president's immigration policy have yet to be worked out, Resnick said the agricultural workforce has been declining for a decade. Today, the association estimates there is a 15 to 20 percent shortage of farmworkers, which is driving the industry to call for substantial immigration reform from Congress, such as a sound guest worker program.

"Hopefully there will be the opportunity for comprehensive immigration reform," said Karen Ross, secretary of the California Department of Food and Agriculture. "That's the right thing to do for this country." California's 330,000 farmworkers account for the largest share of the 2.1 million nationwide, according to the U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics. Texas comes in a distant second with less than half of California's farmworkers.

Once Obama's executive action starts going into effect next year, it will protect the parents of legal U.S. residents from deportation and expand a 2012 program that shields from deportation people brought into the U.S. illegally as children.

Manuel Cunha, president of the Fresno-based Nisei Farmers League, estimates that 85 percent of California's agricultural workers are using false documents to obtain work.

Cunha, who has advised the Obama administration on immigration policy, figures that 50,000 of the state's farmworkers who may benefit from the president's executive action could leave the fields and

packing houses in California's \$46.4 billion agricultural industry.

"How do I replace that?" he said. "I think we're going to have a problem."

Many farmworkers are paid above minimum wage, earning more hourly than they will in other industries, but he said that workers that leave will gain year-around jobs and regular paychecks, rather than seasonal employment.

While farmers may face a setback, Obama's order is good for workers who support families and fear that any day they may be pulled over driving to work and deported, said Armando Elenes, national vice president of the United Farm Workers labor union.

With proper documentation, workers will feel empowered and be more valuable, Elenes said. Confronted with abuse at work — such as being paid less than minimum wage or denied overtime — workers will be able to challenge their employer or leave, he said.

In addition, their newfound mobility will create competition for farmworkers and potentially increase wages, Elenes said, adding, "It's going to open up a whole new world for workers. A lot of times, if you're undocumented, you feel like you're stuck."

Ed Kissam, an immigration researcher at the immigrant advocacy group, WKF Giving Fund, said he doubts a significant number of farmworkers will leave the industry. Farmworkers often lack the language, education and technical skills to move up the employment ladder, he said. "Surely some will," Kissam said. "It's not going to be a mass exodus." □

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AirAsia plane lost in stormy weather

ALI KOTARUMALOS
MARGIE MASON

Associated Press

JAKARTA, Indonesia (AP)

— An astonishingly tragic year for air travel in South-east Asia turned worse Sunday when an AirAsia plane carrying 162 people disappeared over stormy Indonesian waters, with no word on its fate despite several hours of searching by air and sea.

AirAsia Flight 8501 vanished in airspace thick with storm clouds on its way from Surabaya, Indonesia, to Singapore. Searchers had to fight against heavy rain. The Malaysia-based carrier's loss comes on top of the still-unexplained disappearance of Malaysia Airlines Flight 370 in March and the downing of Malaysia Airlines Flight 17 in July over Ukraine.

At the Surabaya airport, passengers' relatives pored over the plane's manifest, crying and embracing. Nias Adityas, a housewife from Surabaya, was overcome with grief when she found the name of her husband, Nanang Priowidodo, on the list.

The 43-year-old tour agent had been taking a family of four on a trip to Singapore, Malaysia and Indonesia's Lombok island, and had been happy to get the work.

"He just told me, 'Praise God, this new year brings a lot of good fortune,'" Adityas recalled, holding her grandson tight while weeping uncontrollably. "He apologized because he could not join us for the new year celebration."

Nearly all the passengers and crew are Indonesians, who are frequent visitors to Singapore, particularly on holidays.

The Airbus A320 took off Sunday morning from Indonesia's second-largest city and was about half-way to Singapore when it vanished from radar. The jet had been airborne for about 42 minutes.

There was no distress signal from the twin-engine, single-aisle plane, said Djoko Murjatmodjo, Indonesia's

acting director general of transportation.

The last communication between the cockpit and air traffic control was at 6:13 a.m. (23:13 GMT Saturday), when one of the pilots "asked to avoid clouds by turning left and going higher to 34,000 feet (10,360 meters)," Murjatmodjo said. The jet was last seen on radar at 6:16 a.m. and was gone a minute later, he told reporters.

Indonesia, Singapore and Malaysia launched a search-and-rescue operation near Belitung island in the Java Sea, the area where the airliner lost contact with the ground.

The air search was suspended Sunday evening and was to resume Monday morning, said Achmad Toha of Indonesia's search-and-rescue agency. Some ships continued looking for the aircraft overnight, he said.

AirAsia group CEO Tony Fernandes flew to Surabaya and told a news conference that the focus should be on the search and the families rather than the cause of the incident.

"We have no idea at the moment what went wrong," said Fernandes, a Malaysian businessman who founded the low-cost carrier in 2001. "Let's not speculate at the moment." Malaysia-based AirAsia has a good safety record and had never lost a plane before.

"This is my worst nightmare," Fernandes tweeted.

But Malaysia itself has already endured a catastrophic year, with 239 people still missing from Flight 370 and all 298 people aboard Flight 17 killed when it was shot down over rebel-held territory in Ukraine.

AirAsia said Flight 8501 was on its submitted flight plan but had requested a change due to weather. Sunardi, a forecaster at Indonesia's Meteorology and Geophysics Agency, said dense storm clouds were detected up to 13,400 meters (44,000 feet) in the area at the time.

"There could have been turbulence, lightning and vertical as well as horizontal strong winds within such clouds," said Sunardi, who like many Indonesians uses only one name.

Airline pilots routinely fly around thunderstorms, said John Cox, a former accident investigator. Using on-board radar, flight crews can typically see a storm forming from more than 100 miles away.

In such cases, pilots have plenty of time to find a way around the storm cluster or look for gaps to fly through, he said.

"It's not like you have to make an instantaneous decision," Cox said. Storms can be hundreds of miles long. □



AirAsia Group CEO Tony Fernandes speaks to the media during a press conference at Juanda International Airport in Surabaya, East Java, Indonesia, Sunday, Dec. 28, 2014.

Associated Press

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1 dead, hundreds stranded in Greek ferry disaster

**DEMETRIS NELLAS
FRANCES D'EMILIO
Associated Press**

ATHENS, Greece (AP) — Italian and Greek military and coast guard rescue crews battled gale-force winds and massive waves Sunday as they struggled to rescue hundreds of people trapped on a burning ferry adrift between Italy and Albania. At least one person died and two were injured.

The Italian Navy said 190 of the 478 people on the ferry, sailing from the Greek port of Patras to Ancona in Italy, had been evacuated by late Sunday night. Most were airlifted by helicopter

to other merchant vessels sailing nearby.

"It will be a very difficult night. A night in which we hope we will be able to rescue all on board," Greek Merchant Marine Minister Miltiadis Varvitsiotis said in Athens.

He said 10 merchant ships were in the area assisting rescue efforts, and that those who had already taken on dozens of passengers from the stricken ferry would remain in the area until the operation was over. Only then would it be determined where they would go, Varvitsiotis said.

The fire broke out before

dawn Sunday on a car deck of the Italian-flagged Norman Atlantic, carrying 422 passengers and 56 crew members. Passengers huddled on the vessel's upper decks, pelted by rain

the rescue operation, said those flames visible from the outside of the ship had been extinguished by about 8:30 pm (1930 GMT), about 16 hours after the blaze began. But the



In this photo taken from a nearby ship, vessels try to extinguish the fire at the Italian-flagged Norman Atlantic after it caught fire in the Adriatic Sea, Sunday, Dec. 28, 2014.

Associated Press

and hail, passengers told Greek media by phone.

Italy and Greece sent navy and coast guard vessels and helicopters to the extensive rescue operation, while nearby merchant ships lined up to form a barrier to protect the ferry from towering waves. As darkness fell, Italian Defense Minister Roberta Pinotti said rescue operations would continue through the night.

The Italian Coast Guard, which was coordinating

ferry was still enveloped in dense smoke, which the Coast Guard probably said was being fueled by some hotspots inside the ship.

Varvitsiotis described the efforts as "one of the most complex search and rescue operations we have dealt with in recent years." An Italian Air Force helicopter pilot said smoke was invading the helicopter cabin, making rescue even more challenging.

"With the wind, smoke entered into the helicopter

cabin, acrid smoke," Maj. Antonio Laneve told Italian state TV. Some of those they were trying to rescue were very frightened of being hoisted up by helicopter given the adverse weather, he said.

Nine of those evacuated were taken to the Italian town of Lecce, authorities said. Of those, three children and a pregnant woman were being treated for hypothermia in Lecce hospital. Dr. Raffaele Montinaro said the children were in "excellent" condition, and emergency room doctor, Antonio Palumbo, said the mother's condition was also good.

The Italian Navy said the man who died and his injured wife were transported by helicopter to the southern Italian city of Brindisi. It was unclear how the death and injury occurred, but the Greek Coast Guard said the pair — both Greek passengers — were found in a lifeboat rescue chute. The second injury was to a member of the Italian military involved in the rescue operation, Coast Guard Admiral Giovanni Pettorino said.

Pettorino told Italy's Sky TG24 TV that two Italian tugs tried to attach themselves to the ferry in the evening, but were frustrated by the thick smoke. □

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N. Korea uses racial slur against Obama over hack

HYUNG-JIN KIM
Associated Press

SEOUL, South Korea (AP)

— North Korea blamed its recent Internet outage on the United States on Saturday and hurled racially charged insults at President Barack Obama over the hacking row involving the movie "The Interview." North Korea's powerful National Defense Com-

mission has denied involvement in a crippling cyberattack on Sony Pictures but has expressed fury over the comedy. Sony Pictures initially called off the release of the film, citing threats of terror attacks against U.S. movie theaters.

Obama criticized Sony's decision, and the movie opened this past week.

North Korean defense commission also blamed Washington for intermittent outages of North Korean websites this past week. The outages happened after Obama blamed the Sony hack on North Korea and promised to respond

"in a place and time and manner that we choose."

The U.S. government has declined to say whether it was behind the Internet shutdown in North Korea. According to the North Korean commission's spokesman, "the U.S., a

big country, started disturbing the Internet operation of major media of the DPRK, not knowing shame like children playing tag." DPRK refers to the North's official name, the Democratic People's Republic of Korea. □



This photo combination shows U.S. President Barack Obama, left, and North Korean leader Kim Jong Un.

Associated Press

mission, which is headed by country leader Kim Jong Un and is the nation's top governing body, said Obama was behind the release of the comedy that depicts Kim's assassination. The commission described the movie as illegal, dishonest and reactionary. "Obama always goes reckless in words and deeds like a monkey in a tropical forest," an unidentified spokesman at the commission's Policy Department said in a statement carried by the country's official Korean Central News Agency. The White House's National Security Council declined to comment Saturday.

It wasn't the first time North Korea has used crude insults against Obama and other top U.S. and South Korean officials.

Earlier this year, North Korea called U.S. Secretary of State John Kerry a wolf with a "hideous" lantern jaw and South Korean President Park Geun-hye a prostitute.

In May, the North's official news agency published a dispatch saying Obama has the "shape of a monkey."

A State Department spokeswoman at the time called the North Korean dispatch "offensive and ridiculous and absurd."

In the latest incident, the



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U.S. mission in Havana to become embassy amid thaw

PETER ORSI
Associated Press

HAVANA (AP) — A half-century after Washington severed relations with Cuba, the United States' seven-story mission looms over Havana's seaside Malecon boulevard as the largest diplomatic outpost in the country.

Cuban guards stand at close intervals on the street outside, and islanders line up by the thousands each year for a shot at a coveted visa.

The gleaming U.S. Interests Section suddenly is poised to become an even more important presence in Cuba as the two countries negotiate the first phase of their historic detente — transforming the complex into a full embassy that would reflect the Obama administration's hopes of new influence on the communist island.

Roberta Jacobson, assistant U.S. secretary of state for Western Hemisphere affairs, will be the highest known U.S. administration official to visit in decades when she comes next month for annual talks on migration that will now also focus on the details of re-establishing full diplomatic relations.

The discussions are expected to cover expanding staffing in the two countries' interests sections and letting diplomats travel outside their respective capitals without having to ask permission.

Also part of the reopening of the embassy: symbolic measures such as raising the American flag on the Malecon.

"Opening an embassy is a symbolic gesture, but symbols are really important," John Caulfield, who was Interests Section chief from 2011 to 2014, said by phone

from Jacksonville, Florida, where he retired.

"This is a pretty powerful symbol by our president that we want to have a more normal relationship with Cuba despite the fact that we have the obvious differences," he added.

Cuba's interests section is a stately manor in Washington's Adams Morgan neighborhood. It, too, stands to become an embassy.

other branches of government.

The U.S. Interests Section has often been a flashpoint for conflict, and its decades of hybrid status reflect the dysfunctional relationship between the two deeply intertwined countries.

The building first opened as an embassy in 1953, the same year Fidel Castro launched an ill-fated assault on a barracks that is considered the onset of the

Cuba later built the adjacent "Anti-Imperialist Plaza," which has hosted nationalist rallies where Castro gave long speeches railing against Washington, and concerts demanding the return of the Cuban intelligence agents whom the U.S. freed last week as part of the detente. Huge marches streamed past the Interests Section in 2000 to demand the return of the young Cuban rafter

sages extolling democracy and human rights to Cubans on the street below. An outraged Cuban government erected dozens of black flags to obscure the signs.

"The consequence of that was, for years, they did not allow us to import light-bulbs," Caulfield recalled with a chuckle.

The U.S. Interests Section is closely watched by cameras and guards on both sides, a function of both the longtime tensions and general increased security at American diplomatic missions following 9/11. Cuban police make pedestrians cross the street to use another sidewalk, and no parking is allowed.

Some neighbors say they love living nearby: Nobody ever gets robbed, and the employees and visa-seekers support local private businesses that were allowed to open under President Raul Castro's economic reforms of recent years.

"Because the whole area is so well guarded, it's very safe," said Pedro Hernandez, 73, who runs a modest snack bar out of his home. "There are no problems with crime of any kind, and that's very good for us."

American diplomats say low-level harassment was routine for many years, as Cuba restricted their movements and activities and dragged its feet on permission to do standard maintenance. Cuban state media routinely portrayed the building as a den of spies.

Both sides gradually moved toward a remarkably civil relationship in recent years. The electronic sign came down in 2009, as did the black flags — though they still fly on special occasions. □



This Dec. 17, 2014 file photo shows a classic American car driving past the U.S. Interests Section building in Havana, Cuba.

Diplomats say privately that Washington hopes to boost staffing in Havana, currently at about 50 Americans and 300 Cuban workers, as more American travelers and trade delegates are expected to come here under new rules to be set by the White House softening the U.S. trade embargo on Cuba.

An agreement could also ease or scrap rules that require U.S. diplomats to channel all requests through Cuba's Foreign Ministry; the diplomats would be able to deal directly with at least some

Cuban Revolution. Eight years later, with Castro then in power, the countries broke ties and Switzerland stepped in to safeguard both the embassy and the ambassador's residence, a sprawling, immaculately groomed estate in Havana's finest neighborhood.

After the break, Washington was without a presence in Cuba until 1977, when the interests sections were opened under President Jimmy Carter. The missions technically operate under the aegis of the "protecting power" Switzerland.

Elia Gonzalez.

On the wall of a conference room in the mission hangs the bronze head of an eagle that topped the nearby USS Maine monument until it was ripped down in a 1961 anti-Yankee protest following the failed Bay of Pigs invasion. The wings and body sit in a musty Cuban museum storage room awaiting a possible reunion with the head on the day that Havana and Washington become friends.

In 2006, U.S. diplomats installed an electronic billboard that scrolled mes-

Associated Press



“Divi Resorts Great Gatsby Christmas Celebration”



The theme for the party was “Great Gatsby” and during this night Employees and Supervisors of the Year 2014 were honored.

The winner for Employee of the Year for Divi and Tamarijn was: Milko Lo-Asioe from the IT Department.

The winner for Supervisor of the Year for Divi & Tamarijn was: Michael “Willy” Martilia from the Divi Beverage Department.

The winner for Employee of the year for Divi/Dutch Village was: Fray Tejeda from the Front Office Department.

The winner for Employee of the Year for Divi Golf Aruba NV “The Links” was: Ronald Feliciano from the Landscaping Department.

The winner for Supervisor of the Year for Divi Golf Aruba NV “The Links” was: Charles Patrick Lampe from the Golf Kitchen Department.

The winner for Employee of the year for Divi Phoenix was: Maria Isabel Betancur from the Housekeeping Department.

The winner for Supervisor of the Year for Divi Phoenix: Enrique Quintero from the F&B Department.

The following employees were the Top Performers for Sales & Timeshare: Top Sales Performer: David Brown from the Phoenix Sales and Top Marketing



Performer: Marc Jonker from the Divi Aruba Sales Consultants.

There were also 2 Special Awards awarded to: Vincent Henry and Martin Mc Pake for Outstanding Marketing Leadership for the year.

Congratulations to all the nominees and the winners for the different categories. Thank you to the Human Resources Department for organizing this wonderful event.

A special thanks to the

following people who contributed to the party: Classic Cars Commission: Philippe and Igor, Tsunami for their wonderful performance during the whole night and Mr. Berkemeyer for his beautiful crystal creations that were awarded to the winners that night.

On behalf of the Management and staff of the Divi Resorts we wanted to wish all employees and the community of Aruba a very Merry Christmas and a Happy New Year! ☐

The chain of Hotels of the Divi Resorts: Divi, Tamarijn, Divi/Dutch Village, Divi Golf, Divi Phoenix, Phoenix Sales, Dal Time and Divi Aruba Sales Consultants celebrated their wonderful Christmas Party on at the Renaissance Convention Center.

Divi Resorts has over 1000

employees in the tourism sector and surely wanted to demonstrate their appreciation and thank them for their good work during the entire year. The success of the companies is thanks to the service and friendliness of the employees. The employees surely enjoyed the entire evening.

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Fish Monday at Bugaloe! Beautiful colorful platter of exquisite fish, yellow rice and rich vegetables is what you will be served from Chef Hernandez' kitchen every Monday. Whether choosing Fried Fish Basket for only \$15 or a delicious Red Snapper



for \$20, you wish it was Monday every day! Bugaloe is known for fun and craziness, so it was only logical Chef Marc Hernandez likes to go wild when it comes to his cooking.



Caught in the morning, served at night is the true Bugaloe way, maybe this explains its popularity from the start. Crazy Fish Monday is served from 5.30 p.m. till 10 p.m. Bugaloe Beach Bar & Grill is open daily from 9 a.m. till midnight. Start your day of right with a delicious cappuccino, or walk in to enjoy a casual lunch in between sunbathing. A few

nights a week Bugaloe is host to some of the best live bands of Aruba, while you are savoring dinner and enjoying the beautiful Aruba Sunset! Don't forget to make one hour in the day even happier at Bugaloe's daily Happy Hour from 5 till 6 p.m. Reservations are not necessary, just follow your hips to the music and the fun and smiles saluting you! □



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Some of our Trip Advisor reviews in a nutshell

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Salt & Pepper's 'super mom' celebrates her 78th birthday with lots of hugs and kisses

"No presents please", said Mrs. Audrey Gage, Salt & Pepper Restaurant's favorite regular guest about her upcoming birthday.

Audrey only wants lots of hugs and kisses and we are sure that she is going to be smothered by the staff of this wonderful restaurant in the Arawak Garden. Everyone is plain

crazy about this special lady, who can be found having breakfast at Salt & Pepper Restaurant every morning. Audrey is a much-liked, lovely woman, who brings flowers from her garden to decorate her breakfast table at the restaurant; that is why she is so proud of her nickname the Flower Lady. Her positive vibes and smiling

face are a welcome sight in the morning. Some of the other regulars have even become her friends. Audrey came to Aruba more than 20 years ago when Salt & Pepper opened its doors.

The staff considers her a super mom, as she always has a kind word for everybody. She brings smiles and cakes on special holidays and she supports local charities. Today Audrey Gage celebrates her 78th birthday and the Salt & Pepper staffers would like to send her a big hug and a huge 'I Love You' this way. Audrey, you are the best! Many happy returns of the day from everyone and keep coming for breakfast, please! Masha Pabien! □

French toast at Salt and Pepper for Paula and George from Massachusetts



"The French toast is awesome," say George and Paula from Massachusetts about their favorite breakfast item at Salt and Pepper Restaurant in the Arawak Garden. The two are always on holiday on Aruba in November; this year they made an ex-

ception and came down in December. George and Paula love the island, the people and the staff at Salt and Pepper and they promise they will be back soon.

Merry Christmas and a happy New Year! □



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At Aqua Grill Restaurant: Caribbean Speed Printers Celebrates the Holidays in Style!

PALM BEACH - The teams of both the Aruba Today and Bon Dia Aruba, together called Caribbean Speed Printers NV, celebrated their holiday season at the



famous Aqua Grill restaurant, located close to the high rise hotels.

The friendly staff took very good care of their guests. A large table was set up in the middle of the dining room especially for this happy group, who were

eating, drinking, laughing, talking and taking pictures of each other. Well, that is what Newspaper associates do right?

All the different departments were mixed up from the editors to lay outers, managers to administrative



team, chatting with each other like one big happy family.

A delicious three course dinner, with choices out of meat, poultry and fish, was served by the staff Of Aqua Grill, with a smile.

And towards the end Mr. Ri-

cardo Wever (Board member) thanked every single one for their hard work and dedication to their job at Caribbean Speed Printers NV and wished them all a merry Christmas and very happy and healthy 2015!

□

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NFL Capsules

Ravens earn playoff berth

The Associated Press

BALTIMORE (AP) — Baltimore earned a spot in the postseason Sunday, rallying to defeat the Cleveland Browns 20-10 while getting an assist halfway across the country.

Down 10-3 in the fourth quarter, the Ravens kicked a field goal and then took the lead on a 16-yard touchdown pass from Joe Flacco to Torrey Smith with 7:33 left.

Flacco's 2-yard TD throw to Kamar Aiken clinched it.

To reach the playoffs for the sixth time in seven years, Baltimore (10-6) needed to beat the Browns (7-9) and have San Diego lose in Kansas City. Precisely what happened. The Browns had lost four straight, were starting rookie quarterback Connor Shaw and had dropped 12 of their past 13 against Baltimore.

Chiefs 19, Chargers 7
KANSAS CITY, Mo. (AP) — Kansas City rolled to a that eliminated San Diego from contention, but the Chiefs failed to get the help they needed to qualify for the playoffs.

Baltimore and Houston both needed to lose in games happening at the same time, and both rallied in the second half for wins.

Justin Houston had four sacks for the Chiefs (9-7) to break Derrick Thomas' franchise record with 22 in the season. Cairo Santos kicked four field goals, and Chase Daniel played serviceably in place of injured quarterback Alex Smith, throwing for 157 yards without an interception.

The Chiefs' only touchdown came when wide receiver Dwayne Bowe fumbled inches shy of the goal line early in the second quarter. Tight end Travis Kelce recovered in the end zone, not only giving Kansas City a 10-0 lead but keeping a dubious streak intact: No Chiefs wide receiver caught a TD pass all season, the first time in at least 50 years that has happened.

Philip Rivers had 291 yards passing for the Chargers (9-7), going over 4,000 yards in a season for the sixth time in his career.

Texans 23, Jaguars 17
HOUSTON (AP) — J.J. Watt had three sacks and a safety and Andre Johnson had 134 yards receiving and a touchdown. The Texans (9-7) had a shot at making the playoffs, but Baltimore beat Cleveland to claim the final AFC wild-card spot.

Johnson gave Houston a 21-17 lead with an 8-yard reception early in the fourth. Watt made it 23-17 when he sacked Blake Bortles in the end zone for a safety a few minutes later. The sack gave him 20 1/2 this season, making him the first player in NFL history to have two seasons with 20 or more sacks. The Jaguars (3-13) had a chance to take the lead late, but Cecil Shorts III was out of bounds on a catch on fourth down.

Cowboys 44, Redskins 17
LANDOVER, Md. (AP) — DeMarco Murray and Dez Bryant broke franchise records as the Cowboys prepped for the playoffs.

Continued on Page 22



Baltimore Ravens wide receiver Kamar Aiken celebrates after scoring a touchdown in the second half of an NFL football game against the Cleveland Browns, Sunday, Dec. 28, 2014, in Baltimore. Baltimore won 20-10.
Associated Press

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NBA Roundup

Jennings leads Pistons to 103-80 win at Cleveland

CLEVELAND (AP) - Brandon Jennings scored 25 points, and the Detroit Pistons used an 18-0 run in the second quarter to roll past the Cleveland Cavaliers 103-80 on Sunday.

It was Cleveland's second blowout loss at home in less than two weeks. The Cavaliers lost 127-98 to Atlanta on

Dec. 17, and the convincing victory for Detroit drew boos from the home crowd.

Andre Drummond had 16 points and 17 rebounds for the Pistons (7-23), who were coming off a 119-109 victory over Indiana on Friday. Reserve Jodie Meeks scored 14 points, and Kentavious Caldwell-

Pope had 13.

Detroit set a season high for made 3-pointers by going 17 for 31 from long range.

Kevin Love had 20 points and 10 rebounds for Cleveland, and LeBron James finished with 17 points, 10 boards and seven assists. Tristan Thompson also had a double-double for the



Detroit Pistons' Brandon Jennings (7) passes in front of Cleveland Cavaliers' Tristan Thompson (13), from Canada, during the second quarter of an NBA basketball game Sunday, Dec. 28, 2014, in Cleveland.

Associated Press

Cavs, collecting 18 points and 11 rebounds. Cavaliers point guard Kyrie Irving missed his second straight game because of a bruised left knee.

James appeared to get hit in the left hip late in the first half, but started the third quarter. The four-time MVP, clearly frustrated by the loss, went to the bench for good with 5:34 remaining and Cleveland trailing 95-71.

The Pistons have won both of their games since releasing veteran forward Josh Smith last week.

Cleveland led 32-17 early in the second and was ahead 43-32 midway through the period before the Pistons took over. Detroit hit four 3-pointers, including two by Jennings, and Drum-

mond had a dunk and a basket in the lane in a span of 4:40.

The Pistons led 50-43 before Love hit a 3-pointer and James added a free throw in the last minute of the first half, but Detroit increased the lead to double figures early in the third quarter and steadily pulled away, leading by 27 points in the fourth.

Cavaliers forward Shawn Marion left the game with an ankle injury after missing a dunk on a pass from James. Marion landed awkwardly and was on the floor for a couple of minutes before being helped to the locker room. He returned in the third quarter.

It was Detroit's first road win against an Eastern Conference team this season. □

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Panthers rally for 6-4 victory over Maple Leafs

By BILL WHITEHEAD

Associated Press

SUNRISE, Fla. (AP) -- Brad Boyes scored a tiebreaking power-play goal in Florida's four-goal third period, and the Panthers beat the Toronto Maple Leafs 6-4 on Sunday night.

Willie Mitchell, Dmitry Kulikov and Scottie Upshall also scored in the third for the Panthers, who have won four of five. Jonathan Huberdeau had a goal and an assist, and Jussi Jokinen had two assists.

James van Riemsdyk had a goal and an assist for Toronto, which has dropped four of five. James Reimer made 29 saves.

Florida and Toronto combined for six goals in the second, but the Panthers controlled the final period. Kulikov started the rally when he whistled a shot past Reimer 2:45 into the third for his first goal of the season. Mitchell, another defenseman, then used a pass from Huberdeau to tie it at 4.

Boyes tipped in Kulikov's shot from the point for the game-winning goal at 16:45, and Upshall added an empty-netter for his fifth of the season.

Florida's closing flourish came after Roman Polak, van Riemsdyk and Nazem Kadri scored in a span of 4:42 in the second period to lift the Maple Leafs to a 4-2 lead.

Polak beat goaltender Roberto Luongo on Toronto's ninth shot at 14:16. Van Riemsdyk then tipped a shot past Luongo at 17:30 after Cody Franson slid the puck between Florida defenseman Dylan Olsen's legs.

The power-play goal was van Riemsdyk's 16th of the



Fans react as Florida Panthers right wing Jimmy Hayes (12) checks Toronto Maple Leafs defenseman Jake Gardiner (51) during the first period of an NHL hockey game Sunday, Dec. 28, 2014, in Sunrise, Fla.

Associated Press

season.

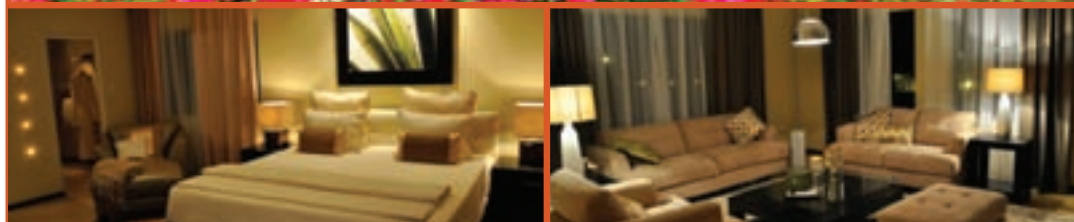
Joffrey Lupul led a 3-on-2 rush down the left wall and fed a pass to Kadri at 18:58, and the center put it away for his 11th goal.

Luongo finished with 13 stops.

Richard Panik, who scored Toronto's first goal on a wrist shot 6:38 into the second, left the game after a hit by Upshall and didn't return for the final period.

Huberdeau answered Panik's goal with a wrist shot at 8:24, and Jimmy Hayes gave Florida a 2-1 lead when he scored his 10th goal off a pass by Sean Bergenheim, who started the rush with a steal.

Reimer was scheduled to start Monday's game in Tampa Bay, but was pressed into action with Jonathan Bernier sidelined by the flu. Toronto brought up Christopher Gibson from Toronto of the AHL to back up Reimer. □

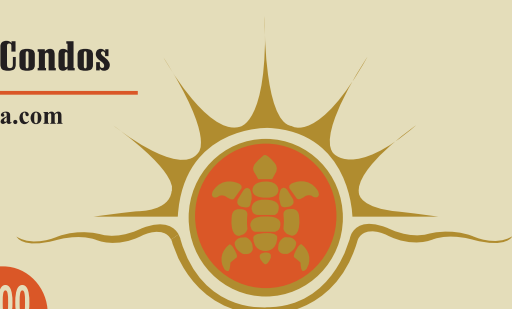


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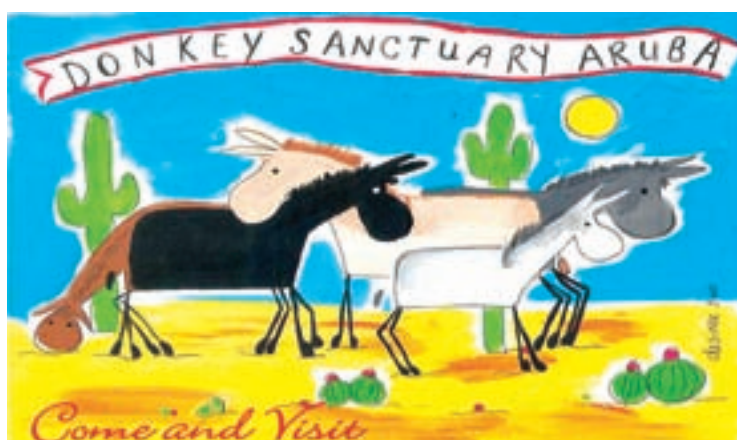
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Trojans hang on to edge Huskers in Holiday Bowl

The Associated Press

SAN DIEGO (AP) — Southern California held on for a 45-42 win over Nebraska in the Holiday Bowl on Saturday, with Adoree' Jackson scoring touchdowns on a 98-yard kickoff return and a 71-yard pass from Cody Kessler.

In the day's other college bowl games, Pennsylvania State beat Boston College in overtime in the Pinstripe Bowl, Arizona State had a tight win over Duke, South Carolina edged Miami in the Independence Bowl, while Virginia Tech had a relatively comfortable win against Cincinnati in the Military Bowl.

USC quarterback Kessler threw for 321 yards and three touchdowns for the Trojans who were playing Nebraska in a bowl game for the first time.

With 2-1/2 minutes left, the Trojans defense stopped De'Mornay Pierson on fourth-and-3 from the USC 31-yard line. Nebraska had one final shot but Tommy Armstrong Jr.'s desperation pass as time ran out was knocked down inside the 10.

Armstrong had brought the Cornhuskers back from a 45-27 deficit with a 65-yard touchdown pass to Jordan Westerkamp and a 15-yard keeper and a 2-point conversion pass to Kenny Bell.

Penn State quarterback Christian Hackenberg threw a 10-yard touchdown pass to Kyle Carter in overtime and kicker Sam Ficken slotted the extra point that Boston College could not, delivering a 31-30 win over the Eagles in the Pinstripe Bowl at Yankee Stadium.

The Nittany Lions played in a bowl game for the

first time since January 2012 after college sports' administrator, the NCAA, lifted the severe sanctions levied against the program in the wake of the Jerry Sandusky child sex abuse scandal.

96 yards to set up the winning score which gave the Sun Devils a 36-31 victory over Duke in the Sun Bowl. Ballage's big return came after Duke had taken a 31-30 lead on receiver Jamison Crowder's 12-

end zone with 45 seconds left.

South Carolina quarterback Dylan Thompson threw for 294 yards and two touchdowns and ran for another score to lead the Gamecocks to a 24-21

passes for 51 yards, but his costly fumble with a little more than 5 minutes remaining set up South Carolina's winning drive.

Virginia Tech's J.C. Coleman ran for 157 yards and a touchdown as the Hokies



Southern California wide receiver JuJu Smith lifts the Holiday Bowl trophy after Southern California's 45-42 victory over Nebraska in the NCAA football game Saturday, Dec. 27, 2014, in San Diego. Associated Press

Ficken sent the game to overtime with a 45-yard field goal with 20 seconds left in regulation, capping Penn State's comeback from a 21-7 deficit in the third quarter, and then won it in overtime.

Boston College got a touchdown on the opening driver of overtime, when Tyler Murphy hit David Dudeck with a 21-yard pass, but kicker Mike Knoll shanked the extra point for the Eagles.

Arizona State's Kalen Ballage returned a kickoff

yard touchdown pass to Isaac Blakeney with 5:03 left. On the kickoff, Ballage took the ball near the goal line and, with the aid of blocking, made it all the way to the 4-yard line.

On the next play, Demario Richard bullocked his way into the end zone for what proved the final score. Quarterback Taylor Kelly was stopped on the 2-point conversion try.

Duke drove to 14 on its final drive, but Anthony Boone's third-and-10 pass was intercepted in the

victory over Miami in the Independence Bowl.

Pharoh Cooper was Thompson's favorite target, catching nine passes for 170 yards, including a spectacular 25-yard grab on the decisive drive late in the fourth quarter.

South Carolina has won a school-record four straight bowl games. Miami ended the season with four defeats and has not won in the postseason since 2006. Hurricanes running back Duke Johnson ran for 132 yards and caught five

ies beat Cincinnati 33-17 in the Military Bowl.

The key moment came in the third quarter when Cincinnati quarterback Gunnar Kiel was sacked, forcing a fumble. Nigel Williams picked up the ball and fumbled at the 12, but Greg Stroman scooped it up and took it into the end zone for a 27-10 lead.

Kiel was taken off the field injured and did not return. Hokies quarterback Michael Brewer went 14 for 24 for 94 yards and a touchdown. □

NFL Capsules

Continued from Page 17

The result was impressive but meaningless for post-season purposes unless at least one game played later in the day ended in a tie. Win or lose against Washington (4-12), NFC East champion Dallas (12-4) would get a first-round bye with losses by both Arizona and Seattle.

Murray rushed for 100 yards on 20 carries, passing Emmitt Smith for the team single-season mark. Murray's 1,845 yards bettered Smith's 1,773 from 1995.

Bryant caught scoring passes of 65 and 23 yards to give him 16 touchdown receptions on the season, breaking Terrell Owens' team record of 15 set in 2007.

Saints 23, Buccaneers 20 TAMPA, Fla. (AP) — Drew Brees threw a 36-yard touchdown pass to Marques Colston with 1:57 remaining to keep the Buccaneers on course to land the top pick in the NFL draft.

Brees shrugged off three interceptions — two of them stopping promising third-quarter drives — to throw for 281 yards. His only



Dallas Cowboys running back DeMarco Murray (29) pushes Washington Redskins cornerback Justin Rogers to the turf during the second half of an NFL football game in Landover, Md., Sunday, Dec. 28, 2014. The Cowboys defeated the Redskins 44-17.

Associated Press

TD pass gave the Saints (7-9) their first lead, and Junior Galette sacked Josh McCown for a safety that provided the final margin. Doug Martin rushed for a season-best 108 yards and rookie Mike Evans set a Tampa Bay record with his 12th touchdown reception as the Bucs (2-

14) flirted with damaging their chances of winding up with the No. 1 overall selection in the draft.

Colts 27, Titans 10 NASHVILLE, Tenn. (AP) — Andrew Luck threw for 160 yards and two touchdowns before sitting out the second half.

The Colts (11-5) bounced

back from their worst performance this season by nearly matching at half-time what they did offensively in the loss at Dallas. They wound up outgaining the Titans 378-192 as the AFC South champs swept their division a second straight season for the first time in franchise history.

Indianapolis will likely host the loser of Cincinnati-Pittsburgh in a wild-card game.

With their 10th straight loss and Tampa Bay's loss to New Orleans, the Titans (2-14) finished their worst season since 1994 and likely will pick second overall in the draft.

Bills 17, Patriots 9

FOXBOROUGH, Mass. (AP) — Kyle Orton threw for one touchdown, Anthony Dixon ran for another and the Bills finished their first winning season in 10 years with a win over the going-through-the motions Patriots.

With the top seed in the AFC playoffs already clinched, the Patriots used quarterback Tom Brady for only the first half and held out tight end Rob Gronkowski and five other starters.

The victory snapped several streaks: Buffalo's 0-12 record at Gillette Stadium

and New England's 35 straight home wins against AFC teams.

It was a price the Patriots (12-4) were willing to pay to protect key players, although left tackle Nate Solder didn't return after hurting his knee late in the first half.

The Bills (9-7) were eliminated from the playoffs a week earlier.

Jets 37, Dolphins 24

MIAMI GARDENS, Fla. (AP) — Geno Smith had his best game in a rocky season, throwing for a career-high 358 yards and three touchdowns in what might be Rex Ryan's final game as Jets coach.

Smith's performance more than negated a 97-yard run by Lamar Miller, the longest play from scrimmage in Dolphins history. The Jets rallied from a 10-point third-quarter deficit, and Ryan ordered a fake punt with four minutes left that sealed the victory. The game was entertaining but mostly meaningless because it involved two teams out of the playoff chase. And with the Jets sitting out the postseason for the fourth consecutive year, owner Woody Johnson is widely expected to fire Ryan, and perhaps general manager John Idzik. □

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Chattanooga touts transformation into Gig City

ERIK SCHELZIG

Associated Press

CHATTANOOGA, Tennessee (AP) — A city once infamous for the smoke-belching foundries that blanketed its buildings and streets with a heavy layer of soot is turning to lightning-fast Internet speeds to try to transform itself into a vibrant tech hub.

Through a combination of political will and federal stimulus money, 175-year-old Chattanooga became the first U.S. city to broadly offer a gigabit per second internet speeds — nearly 50 times the national broadband average.

Whether that's enough to turn a modest southern city into a mini Silicon Valley remains to be seen, but local leaders are betting they've positioned themselves well for what lies ahead in the global economy.

"This is an old town with a new vision," said Aaron Welch, who became a hero of the emerging tech scene when he sold his app that reserves specific tables at restaurants to a rival for \$11.5 million.

Other startups migrating to the "Gig City" to tap into the government-owned broadband network include 3D Ops, which converts MRI or CT scans into anatomical replicas to help doctors prepare for surgeries; shoemaker Feetz, which makes custom footwear using 3D printing technology; and moving service Bellhops, which coordinates the logistics of managing 8,000 college student contractors nationwide.

The nascent tech scene is the latest development in Chattanooga's decades-long effort to reinvent itself after a 1969 federal study called it the most polluted

U.S. city.

A downtown revival over the last two decades was anchored by the Tennessee Aquarium and a \$120 million redevelopment of the Tennessee River waterfront. German automaker Volkswagen in 2008 cited the city's turnaround in its decision to build a \$1 billion assembly plant on the site of a former TNT plant.

The city inaugurated its fiber optic network — with an \$111 million boost from the 2009 federal stimulus package — even as larger cities like Atlanta and Nashville wait for private providers like AT&T and Google to roll out comparable service.

"We're at a pivotal time in the relationship between cities and communications networks," said Susan Crawford, a professor at Harvard Law School who has written extensively about the power of Internet providers. "And there are mayors all over the country who are watching Chattanooga with envy and wishing and planning for fiber optic networks of their own."

While commercial providers pick and choose which neighborhoods to serve, Chattanooga's network covers the city.

"The whole point is that you want everyone to have this capacity, and not to leave anyone behind," said Crawford.

Chattanooga's fiber network grew out of efforts to install a smart electric grid in a city where tornadoes and ice storms have caused serious power outages. During the upgrade, the Electric Power Board, or EPB, also issued \$226 million in bonds to help fund a fiber optic network, hoping the superfast phone and



In this Nov. 17, 2014, photo, men walk by a sign in Chattanooga, Tenn., promoting it as Gig City. The city's municipal fiber optic network provides Internet speeds at more than 50 times the national average.

Associated Press

Internet service would attract new business.

According to the Federal Communications Commission, the average broadband speed in 2013 was 21.2 megabits per second. A gigabit equals 1,000 megabits. The fiber network has upload speeds matching downloads, bringing near real-time transfer of information between high-bandwidth users. It let musicians T Bone Burnett in Los Angeles and Chuck Mead in Chattanooga play a live concert together while thousands of miles apart in December 2013.

Jonathan Taplin, director of the Annenberg Innovation Lab at the University of Southern California, which helped organize the concert, said entertainment executives might be intrigued.

James Cameron, director of the movies "Avatar" and "Titanic," wants to make films at double the current ultra-high definition 4K standard, Taplin said. The 500 megabits per second

needed would be out of reach for most, but Chattanooga's fiber customers "could handle that today." The municipal network has been criticized for unfairly crowding out private providers.

"EPB's entire network is propped up on the backs of ratepayers and taxpayers," said Justin Owen, head of the Beacon Center of Tennessee, a conservative think tank.

Mayor Andy Berke counters that the city had no other option.

"No one was begging to come to Chattanooga to put up a fiber optic network," he said.

EPB initially charged \$350 a month for the gigabyte speed, but has slashed that to \$70, driving subscriptions from fewer than 100 to more than 4,700. Another 55,000 residential customers get the cheaper 100-megabyte service.

Tech startup guru Sheldon Grizzle founded The Company Lab to hold tech competitions and mentor-

ship programs that take advantage of the city's internet capacity — and to connect entrepreneurs with investors. They included Welch, who first hashed out his restaurant reservation app idea in one of the lab's 48-hour startup competitions.

Grizzle in 2011 persuaded Welch to quit his day job by helping land a \$65,000 investment in his company, Quickcue, which was sold to reservation giant Open Table in 2013. Welch went on to found Iron Gaming, which hosts competitions for gamers, and is working on creating a television network for computer geeks.

But Welch said developers still struggle to lure financial backers in a city long associated with heavy industry, the Chattanooga Choo-Choo and the country's first Coca-Cola bottling plant — though there are signs that venture capitalists in cities like San Francisco and Los Angeles might finally be paying attention. □

Sony film mess reflects gadgets-entertainment gap

ELAINE KURTENBACH

AP Business Writer

TOKYO (AP) — Sony's iconic gadgetry and the star appeal of Hollywood may have appeared to be a perfect match when the electronics giant bought Columbia Pictures in 1989. A quarter century later, it's apparent that Sony Corp. has not attained the magic synergy it was hoping for. The stolid silence of Sony's Tokyo headquarters over the hoopla surrounding Sony Pictures Entertainment's "The Interview" underscores the longstanding divide between the Japanese parent company and its U.S.-led and -run motion pictures subsidiary, successor to Columbia Pictures. Marrying the cultures of Sony Corp., a quintessen-



In this Dec. 2, 2014 file photo, cars enter Sony Pictures Entertainment headquarters in Culver City, Calif.

Associated Press

Minnesota's Pohlads acquire Polaroid majority

MINNEAPOLIS (AP) — Minnesota's Pohlads family has acquired majority ownership of Polaroid in a \$70 million deal.

Minnetonka-based Polaroid is best known for making instant cameras but the name can be found on a variety of electronic goods, including tablets, cameras and flat-screen TVs.

The company filed for bankruptcy protection in 2008 and most of its assets were sold to private investors the following year but the bankruptcy estate still had a partial ownership stake in the company.

Last week, a federal bankruptcy judge approved selling that ownership stake to the Pohlads and an undisclosed partner, the Star Tribune reported. The Pohlads-owned Marquette Companies also acquired ownership from previous investors in Polaroid to gain control of about 65 percent of the company.

The transaction was completed Monday, the newspaper reported.

"We are doing this for three reasons," Jann Ozzello Wil-

cox, the chief investment officer for Marquette Companies, said in a statement to the Star Tribune. "First, we continue to seek good, strategic growth opportunities; second,

we see Polaroid as an iconic brand with a licensing model that's working, and third, it's a local company with a solid management team."

Polaroid CEO Scott Hardy said in a statement the deal will bring stable family capital to the Polaroid brand over the long term.

"This sale will be the next step in the ongoing resurgence of our iconic American brand and we are very excited about what it means for Polaroid in 2015 and beyond," Hardy said. Polaroid was founded in 1937 in Cambridge, Massachusetts, by inventor Edwin Land. The company shook up the photography world in 1948 with the first instant camera. The Pohlads are one of the wealthiest families in Minnesota and have owned the Minnesota Twins baseball team since 1984. □

tially Japanese company, and its Hollywood studio was such a challenge that company founder Akio Morita and his successor as chairman, Norio Ohga, never really tried, analysts say. Instead, they left Sony Pictures to mostly run itself.

"They're separate businesses run by separate management," said Damian Thong, a senior analyst at Macquarie Capital Securities (Japan). "Since the late 1990s it's been run basically as a stand-alone business." Sony Corp. in Tokyo refused requests for comment on developments related to "The Interview," referring all inquiries to Sony Pictures in the U.S. After first withdrawing the movie from a planned Christmas release on as many as 3,000 screens, Sony Pictures made the movie available on various digital platforms Wednesday, a day after Sony and independent theaters agreed to release it in over 300 venues on Christmas.

There were no plans to release the movie in Japan, even before hackers objecting to its satirical portrayal of an assassination of North Korea's leader Kim Jong Un staged a massive cyberattack on Sony Pictures.

As entertainment has shifted to digital delivery

systems, technology analysts say it has become increasingly clear that Sony botched an opportunity to outdo Apple in creating a far more influential and valuable business from melding its consumer electronics expertise with ownership of a major movie studio and recording label.

"It feels like there has been a lot of fumbling and a lack of coordination there for too long," said Rosenblatt Securities analyst Martin Pyykkonen. "They really haven't won in anything in a long time when they could have been a leader in terms of bringing devices and technology together. So shame on them."

The lack of integration between Sony's main divisions carries throughout the group and is among the reasons why the once iconic electronics giant has fallen behind, says Sea-Jin Chang, author of "Samsung vs. Sony" and a business professor at Singapore University.

Looking back, Chang believes Sony's 1989 acquisition of Columbia Pictures was mainly a trophy purchase driven by Morita's personal whims.

"They made all the possible mistakes they could make in an acquisition," Chang said. "It was driven by ego. It suffered from bad imple-

mentation. If you teach a class on M&A (mergers and acquisitions) this is the case study on how not to do it," he said.

Sony's top executives have generally refrained from meddling in the moviemaking process, giving Sony Pictures an autonomy that allows the studio creative leeway. But in turn the Sony brand has not gotten much exposure through the films it produces.

"To be fair, I don't think there has ever been that much of a synergy in the sense that a Sony picture has ever sold a Sony product in a meaningful way," Thong said.

Twenty or 30 years ago, that didn't matter so much. But now that Sony Corp.'s overall brand appeal has faded, it needs all the help it can get.

Sony Pictures has its ups and downs but has been a relatively strong performer in recent years, with hits like "American Hustle" and "22 Jump Street" adding to the studio's brand value.

"Sony Pictures overall is quite important from a marketing relationship point of view, just because it's one of the few properties now that is really getting people to see the Sony name anymore," said Benjamin Cavender, a senior consumer electronics analyst at China Research Group in Shanghai.

Some of the frustration with this longstanding malaise boiled over last year when an activist investor, New York hedge fund manager Daniel Loeb, bought a 7 percent stake in the company and urged CEO Kazuo Hirai to spin off the entertainment division. Hirai didn't, but Sony cut costs, laying off dozens of workers, to boost Sony Entertainment's profits before Loeb sold his stake earlier this year.

Like many long-established companies that have been caught off guard by technological upheaval, Sony was still making too much money in its traditional lines of businesses to have the incentive to try something radically different. □

AP-GfK Poll:

5 things to know about the US economy

**JENNIFER AGIESTA
EMILY SWANSON**

Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — Few issues in a presidential campaign come close to being as meaningful as the economy. The latest Associated Press-GfK poll offers a look at how the public feels about this issue, which touches nearly every aspect of American life. As the 2016 candidates get set to kick off their campaigns, here are five things to know about public opinion on the U.S. economy.

THE ECONOMY ISN'T A MONOLITH

The economy, writ large, has been America's top policy priority for the entirety of Barack Obama's presidency, despite the slowly building recovery and the recent skyrocketing stock market. But focusing on this overall concern masks a distinction that matters to many Americans. Though negative perceptions of the economy overall are down compared with four years ago (57 percent describe it as "poor" compared with 83 percent who did in November 2010), Americans' ratings of their own finances are actually a bit worse than they were back then (38 percent describe their household's finances as poor, up from 30 percent in 2010). Young Americans, under age 30, have an exceptionally negative take on their finances, with nearly half describing them as poor.

Along the same lines, while a majority of Americans say the stock market and big businesses have mostly recovered from the Great Recession, just 16 percent think small businesses have, 27 percent say the job market where they live is mostly recovered and only 34 percent say their family is largely back to normal.

EDUCATION, LOCATION, INCOME LINKED TO IMPRESSION OF ECONOMY

For some in America, the economy is humming along. Majorities of college graduates, urban residents



This Sept. 10, 2014, file photo shows signs welcoming visitors to a model home as construction is under way at a housing development in Zelienople, Pa.

Associated Press

and people with incomes of \$100,000 or more say the economy is in good shape. By contrast, just 28 percent of rural residents, 35 percent without college degrees and 35 percent with incomes under \$50,000 say it's in good shape. Half of those with incomes under \$50,000 and 42 percent of rural residents say they and their families haven't yet recovered from the Great Recession.

Rural residents feel the labor and real estate markets in their area have been particularly hard hit: 45 percent say their local real estate market has only recovered a little or not at all, while 53 percent say the same about their local job market.

EXPECTATIONS ARE SOMEWHAT BETTER

The poll finds an uptick in Americans' hopes for their own finances and the nation's finances in the coming year. In the new poll, 34 percent say they expect their household's financial situation to improve over the next 12 months, better than the 27 percent saying so in October. And 38 percent think the overall economic situation in the country will improve in the coming year, up from 31 percent in October. On

both measures, the share saying things would worsen dropped significantly. Still, 48 percent see stagnation ahead for themselves and 42 percent see sluggishness for the economy more broadly.

INCHING TOWARD RECOVERY

That expectation of stagnation may be because that's what most Americans think the economy is doing now. Asked how the economy had changed

in the last month, 60 percent said it stayed about the same. Nearly a quarter think it improved, while 14 percent say it's gotten worse. Those figures are slightly rosier than in October, when 24 percent said things had worsened. But the majority saying things are staying the same has held over two years of AP-GfK polls, with one exception during the partial government shutdown in October 2013 when the share saying things got worse spiked to 45 percent.

LITTLE FAITH IN WASHINGTON TO IMPROVE THINGS

Who can turn things around? Very few think it's Washington. Two-thirds of Americans say it's unlikely that the newly elected Republican majority in Congress will be able to improve the economy in the next two years, and 6 in 10 say Obama won't be able to either. Three in 10 say they don't even trust either party to handle the economy. □

Algeria calls for OPEC to cut oil production

AOMAR OUALI

Associated Press

ALGIERS, Algeria (AP) — Algeria's oil minister on Sunday called on OPEC to cut production and raise the price of oil, which has plunged dramatically in the last six months.

The call by Youcef Yousfi to the Organization of Petroleum Exporting Countries, of which Algeria is a member, comes as the country is struggling to deal with a halving of oil prices from \$120 barrel to \$60 a barrel. "For us, OPEC has to intervene to correct the imbalance and cut production to bring up prices and defend the income of its member states," Yousfi said in remarks carried by the state news agency.

While Algeria has some \$200 billion foreign reserves, enough to cover imports for the next several years, it is heavily dependent on its oil revenue which provides 97 percent of its hard currency income and 60 percent of the budget.

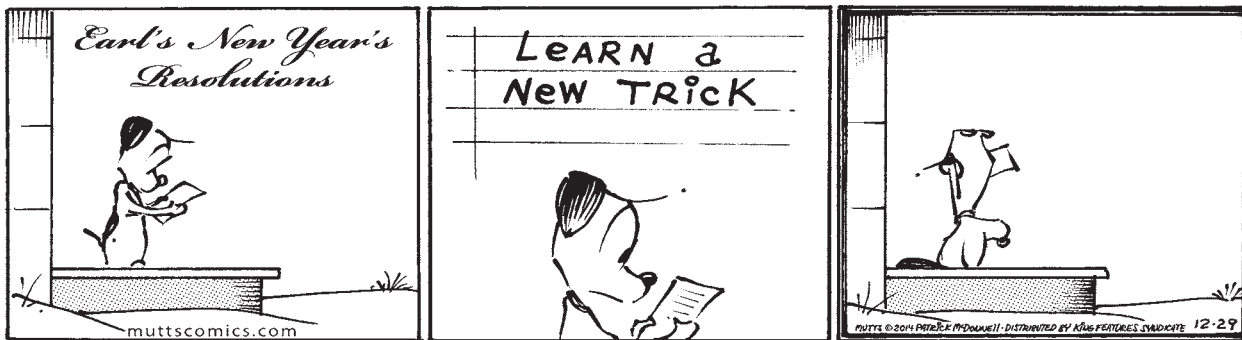
In a cabinet meeting Tuesday, President Abdelaziz Bouteflika for the first time expressed concern over the "worrisome" situation and made vague promises of cost-cutting.

The first of such austerity measures came Saturday when Prime Minister Abdelmalek Sellal said there would be a freeze on public sector hiring in 2015. Some 60 percent of the jobs in the country come from the government.

Major infrastructure projects, such as public transportation in Algiers and highways in the countryside are also expected to be put on hold. Long flush with money from its gas and oil exports, Algeria operates an extensive welfare state. Subsidies, which amount to 21 percent of the country's annual economic output, cover electricity and many foodstuffs. Gasoline is the cheapest in North Africa.

The government also subsidizes education and provides housing. Social unrest, even before the scattered protests of the Arab Spring, was effectively bought off with higher wages and promises of housing — all funded by the bountiful oil receipts. □

Mutts



6 Chix



Blondie



Mother Goose & Grimm



Baby Blues



Zits



Conceptis Sudoku

3			9		8		4	5
8		2			1	9		
	1			3			6	
6	4							9
		5		4		6		
1							7	4
	8			7			2	
		9	8			7		6
4	6		3		2			8

Difficulty Level ★

12/29

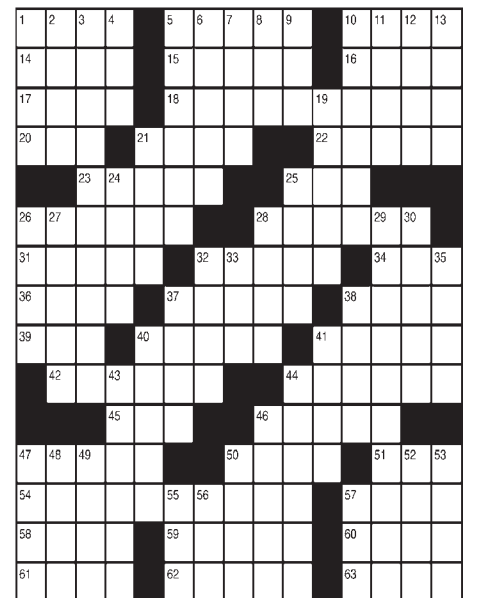
Sudoku is a number-placing puzzle based on a 9x9 grid with several given numbers. The object is to place the numbers 1 to 9 in the empty squares so that each row, each column and each 3x3 box contains the same number only once. The difficulty level of the Conceptis Sudoku increases from Monday to Sunday.

Saturday's puzzle answer

3	8	2	6	1	5	4	7	9
7	9	6	4	3	8	1	5	2
1	5	4	9	7	2	8	6	3
9	2	5	3	8	4	6	1	7
8	7	1	2	9	6	3	4	5
4	6	3	7	5	1	2	9	8
5	4	8	1	2	7	9	3	6
6	3	7	8	4	9	5	2	1
2	1	9	5	6	3	7	8	4

ACROSS

- Hauls a disabled car
- End of the Greek alphabet
- Murders, slangily
- State firmly
- Pink shade
- Bucket
- Golf pegs
- Paint thinner
- Most common conjunction
- Kittens and hamsters, e.g.
- Felt ill
- Actor Brian
- "Much About Nothing"
- Expresses one's views
- Adheres
- Shapes
- More ashen-faced
- Hole-making tool
- Misfortunes
- off; disregard
- On the house
- up; bind
- Ginger or mace
- Wise men
- Traumatic experience
- Thin leather bands
- Betrayer
- Rosebush
- prickle
- Valuable item
- Let fall
- Children's running game
- ads; section of a newspaper
- Hick
- Clothing
- Desert rover
- Sentry's cry
- Remain
- Penniless
- Small bills



Created by Jacqueline E. Mathews

12/29/14

Saturday's Puzzle Solved

SIP	USHER	TUBA
ATOP	THERE	APES
DIRE	TERRA	ROCK
SENSELESS	IRKS	
CARL	OFF	
SPRIGS	BONAFIDE	
POOLS	TUBER	DIM
RIMS	PAGED	HEAP
ASA	BILLY	MEANT
TENTACLE	BARLEY	
ARC	SLIM	
CRAB	ORPHANAGE	
HAIL	LIARS	NERD
ACME	OCTET	SAGA
PEST	SEEDS	ROB

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12/29/14

DOWN

- Casual farewell

- Convection
- Roundup, for one
- Dads of Jrs.
- Groups of eight
- Facial feature
- Goofs
- Opening
- Stein contents
- Choice
- Flunk
- Acceptable
- Luge vehicle
- Low point
- Dessert choices
- Concludes
- Costs an arm and
- Leave out
- FDR's affliction
- Classic board game
- Enormous
- Use a broom
- Gramm or Mickelson
- Band of sparks

- Not as much
- Quarrel
- Actor Jamie
- Chairs & stools
- Go no further
- Like formal wear
- Poorly built
- on; trample
- Goes on stage
- Job opening
- Long narrative
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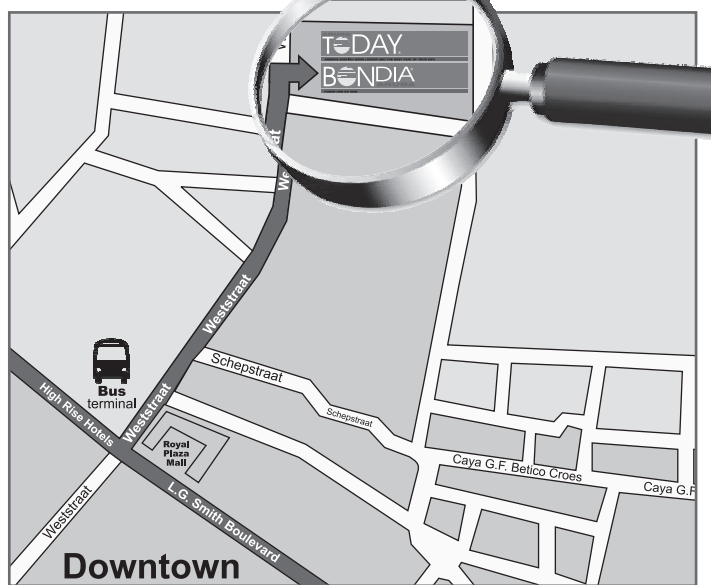
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Conservationists, loggers team up on forest health

By **JEFF BARNARD**
Associated Press

JOHN DAY, Ore. (AP) --

Logs are piled high in the yard of the Malheur Lumber Co. mill in this small town in northeastern Oregon, ready to be sawed into lumber. Steam pours out of the stacks. Trucks loaded with logs roll in.

John Day, a town of 1,700, nearly died two years ago. Its lifeblood, the sawmill, was about to close. So few logs were coming off the nearby Malheur National Forest, the mill's owners decided it was time to shut down.

But the mill and the town's economy were rescued by a detente between the timber industry and environmentalists - foes since the battles over logging that erupted in the Pacific Northwest three decades ago. The sides uncovered a shared goal: thinning overgrown forests to prevent catastrophic wildfires. Talk to people in town and you'll still hear grumbling from those who don't trust environmentalists. But not from Art Andrews, manager of Malheur Lumber.

"When I tell people that it's the environmental community that saved this community, they say, 'Oh, baloney!'" Andrews said. "But I lived it. I know it's true."

Mills in timber country have been steadily closing as fighting continues over how to log national forests without killing protected species like spotted owls and salmon. Across the West, there are efforts to build trust among timber interests, environmentalists and local residents, and the U.S. Forest Service hopes the success of John Day serves as a model. There is little private timber

to draw on in such towns, east of the Cascades. One logging project after another in the Malheur National Forest was shot down by lawsuits from environmentalists. Meanwhile, the community was demanding logs. "We were at a stalemate," recalled Steve Beverlin, supervisor of the

Billman said of Lillebo. "He was the devil, I guess." Lillebo was a founder of the Oregon Natural Resources Council, now Oregon Wild. They first met at a meeting of the collaborative, and they soon found they agreed on most of the issues.

Before long, Billman and Lil-

lers they had a truce.

"We agreed that there was a lot of (timber) to be had from ecological forestry," Kerr recalled. "And he didn't want the big trees anyway, so why were we fighting?"

Grant County Commissioner Boyd Britton, a welder who lost customers when

Shelk decided Malheur Lumber had to shut down in 2012, members of the collaborative were able to act. They quickly signed off on delayed forest-thinning projects and developed logging plans that could sustain the mill. Last year, they approved a 10-year "Stewardship Contract"



In this photo taken on Nov. 20, 2014, a loader stacks logs at the Malheur Lumber Co. mill in John Day, Ore.

Associated Press

Malheur National Forest. Then, Blue Mountains Forest Partners formed in 2006, a collaborative group designed to bring together all sides of the community - especially environmentalists and the timber industry - to come up with projects that lawsuits wouldn't stop. Out of innumerable meetings and forest tours grew a few key friendships among people who became peacemakers in the timber war. Among them were Mike Billman, timber buyer for the Malheur Lumber Co. mill, and conservationist Tim Lillebo.

"I had never met him, but I'd heard of him plenty,"

lebo were getting together for camping trips.

"Early on, we talked about industry, ecological and collaborative things," Billman said. "As we became better friends, our discussions became about our personal lives, our families and all that."

They weren't the only ones. Outside the collaborative, John Shelk, managing partner of Ochoco Lumber Co., which owns Malheur Lumber, decided in 2008 he had to do something and invited Andy Kerr, another founder of the Oregon Natural Resources Council, to his office. By 2009, they were telling oth-

two other mills shut down, came to trust and respect Susan Jane Brown, a lawyer for the Western Environmental Law Center who shot down so many timber sales.

Brown said a key shift came when environmentalists started realizing that wildfires posed as big a threat to the forests as logging. And the way to protect the forests was to work with the collaborative to approve projects that thinned overgrown stands while providing enough logs to keep the local mill running.

The atmosphere of trust and respect had reached such a point that when

awarded to a local logging company, Iron Triangle.

The company took a chance that it could do the thinning and restoration projects in the contract in return for enough logs to make it pay. This year, the mill hired 30 workers. And Malheur National Forest hired 40 people to turn out more restoration projects as it tries to expand the efforts to the other forests in the region.

"Why it worked on Malheur Lumber when it did is because we had the right people involved at the right time for the right reason," Brown said. □



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'The Hobbit' wins Christmas, 'Big Eyes' flops



In this image released by Warner Bros. Pictures, Martin Freeman appears in a scene from the film, "The Hobbit: The Battle of the Five Armies."

LINDSEY BAHR
AP Film Writer

LOS ANGELES (AP) — Audiences had their pick of genres over the Christmas

weekend, but despite a host of fresh arrivals, splashy holiday fare like "Unbroken" and "Into the Woods" proved no match

for "The Hobbit: The Battle of the Five Armies." The final installment in Peter Jackson's trilogy marched to the top spot once again

with an estimated \$41.4 million take across the weekend, according to studio estimates Sunday. Universal's World War II epic "Unbroken," took second place with \$31.7 million from the weekend, bringing its domestic total to \$47.3 million from its first four days in theaters. "We're all thrilled," Nikki Rocco, Universal's president of domestic distribution said of the Angelina Jolie-directed drama. "It's a testament to how great this movie is. I'm so happy that America found out about it." Added Rentrak's senior media analyst Paul Dergarabedian: "The story of Louis Zamperini really offered a nice alternative for moviegoers who weren't looking for a fantasy world, a musical or a family film." Disney's musical "Into the Woods," boasting a star-packed cast and a PG rating, came in a close third

with \$31 million, and \$46.1 million across the four days. It replaced "Mamma Mia" as the biggest opening for a screen adaptation of a Broadway musical ever. "To be able to take (Stephen) Sondheim and (James) Lapine's work and make it available to a mass audience? It's a great holiday gift in and of itself," said Disney's distribution Executive Vice President Dave Hollis. The rest of the top five was populated by holdovers "Night at the Museum: Secret of the Tomb" and "Annie" which earned \$20.6 million and \$16.6 million, respectively, in their second weekend in theaters. "Their opening numbers didn't really set the world on fire, but, as we thought, they would play well over the Christmas holiday," Dergarabedian said.

Continued on Next Page

'The Hobbit'

Continued on Previous Page

Sony's "The Interview," which was also available for rental and purchase online, ultimately took in \$2.8 million from 331 theaters since its opening on Thursday, with \$1.8 million of that coming from the weekend.

"I'm so grateful that the movie found its way into theaters, and I'm thrilled that people actually went out and saw it," said writer, director and star Seth Rogen in a statement. Sony initially called off the release after major theater chains dropped the comedy depicting the assassination of North Korean leader Kim Jong Un due to threats from hackers. But with President Barack Obama, among others criticizing the decision, Sony officials changed their minds.

"We are very pleased

with how it is doing both theatrically where we are seeing numerous sell-outs across the country, and online where it remains at the top of many charts" added Sony's president of worldwide distribution Rory Bruer. Earnings from digital rentals were not made available.

Other weekend debuts include Paramount's "The Gambler," which took seventh place with \$9.3 million, and The Weinstein Company's "Big Eyes," which earned only \$2.97 million across the weekend from 1,307 screens and \$4.4 million from the four-day period.

In limited release, Clint Eastwood's fact-based Iraq war drama "American Sniper" also opened in four locations, taking in \$610,000, while Ava DuVernay's Martin Luther King Jr. drama "Selma" opened in 19 locations to \$590,000 over



This photo released by Disney Enterprises, Inc. shows Meryl Streep as the Witch in a scene from the film, "Into the Woods." The movie opened in theaters Dec. 25, 2014. Associated Press

the three-day weekend. Dergarabedian thinks that less impressive debuts, such as Tim Burton's awards hopeful "Big Eyes," could find an

audience in the coming weeks. "It's just very, very crowded out there," Dergarabedian said. "The audience wins,

though. There is so much choice out there. If you can't find a movie to your liking in this lineup, then you just don't like movies." □

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